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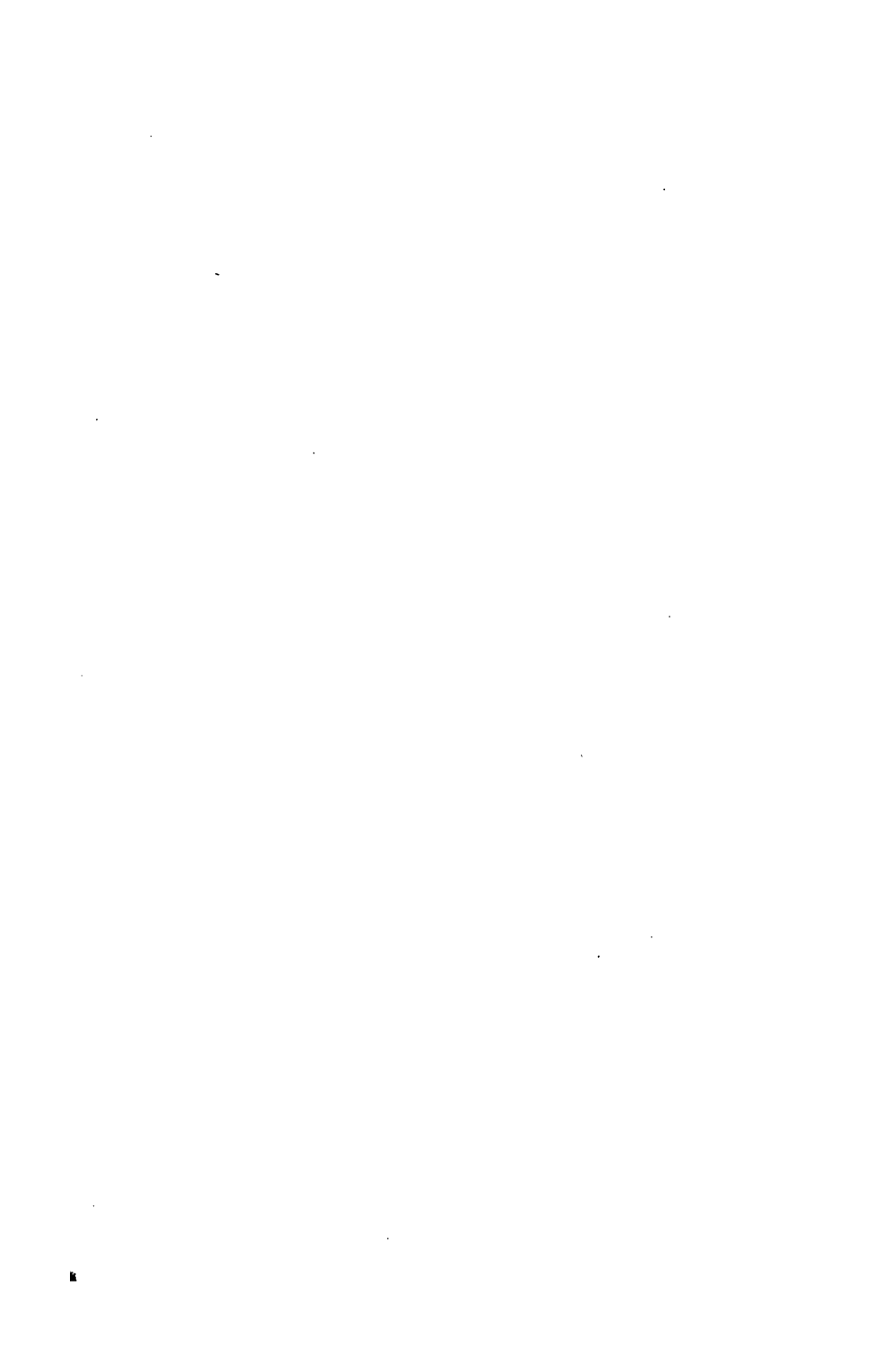
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COLLECTED VERSES

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COLLECTED VERSES

BY

VIOLET FANE

AUTHOR OF 'DENZIL PLACE' 'QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES'
'ANTHONY BABINGTON' ETC

'The years pass on, the seasons go their round,
Hate is o'erpassed, Love plumes his fickle wings,
Whilst, safe within his plot of garden-ground.
Mourning the mutability of things,
The Poet sings'



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COLLECTED VERSES.



A REVERIE.

BY the side of a ruined terrace
I sat in the early spring ;
The leaves were so young that the speckled hen-thrush
Could be seen as she sat in the hawthorn bush,
Falt'ring and faint at the cuckoo's cry ;
The cypress looked black against the green
Of folded chestnut and budding beech,
And up from the slumbering vale beneath
Came now and again the ominous ring
Of a passing bell for a village death.
Yet a spirit of hope went whispering by,
Through the wakening woods, o'er the
daisied mead ;
And up the stem of the straight
Scotch fir

A Reverie.

An insolent squirrel, in holiday brush,
Went scampering gaily, at utmost speed,
To gnaw at his fir-apples out of reach.
All seemed so full of life and stir,
Of twitter and twinkle, and shimmer and sheen,
That I closed my book, for I could not
read ;
So I sat me down to muse instead,
By the side of the ruined terrace,
In the breath of the early spring.

Alas that the sound of a passing-bell,
(Only proclaiming some villager's death,)
As it echoes up from the valley beneath,
Should summon up visions of trestle and shroud !
And pity it is that yon marble urn,
Fall'n and broken should seem to tell
Of days that are done with, and may not return
Whatever the future shall chance to be !
Hollow and dead as the empty shell
Of last year's nut as it lies on the grass,
Or the frail laburnum's withered seed,
That hang like felons on gallows-tree :
This is a truth that half aloud

We may but murmur with bated breath :
How many sat as I sit to-day,
In the vanished hours of the olden-
time,
Watching the Spring in her early
prime
Beam, and blossom, and go her way !
Squirrels that sport and doves that coo,
And leaves that twinkle against the blue,
And green woodpecker and screeching jay,
Ye are purposeless things that perish and pass,
Yet you wanton and squander your transient day,—
My soul is sickened at sight of you !
‘I had rather be shrouded and coffined and dead’
(To my innermost soul I, sighing, said)
‘Than know no pleasure save love and play !’
Then all seemed so full of the odour of Death
(Though I smelt the gorse-blossom blown from the
heath),
That I opened my book and tried to read,
Since my soul was too saddened to muse instead,
By the side of the ruined terrace,
In the breath of the early spring.

I wonder now if it could be right

For the Great First Cause to let such things be ?

To plan this blending of black and white,—

(I know for myself I had made *all* bright !)

And to mould me, and make me, and set me here,

Without my leave and against my will,

With never so much as a word in mine ear

As to how I may pilot my bark through the night ?

Was it well, I wonder, or was it ill,

That I should feel such a wish to be wise,

And dream of flying, and long for sight,

With faltering footsteps and bandaged eyes,

To be blamed the more that I may not see,

As I stagger about in a wilderness,

And know no more than the worms and the flies ?

I feel at my heart that it is not right—

‘Nothing is right and nothing is just ;

We sow in ashes and reap the dust ;

I think, on the whole, I would rather be

The wandering emmet, that loses its way

On the desert-plain of my muslin-dress,

Than be moulded as either a woman or man.

(All this I said in my bitterness.)

‘Yet who is to help me and who is to blame ?’

But just at that moment a hurrying sound,
A sound as of hurrying pattering feet,
In the dry leaves under the hawthorn bush,
Troubled the heart of the speckled hen-thrush,
Whilst the love-sick pigeon that called to her mate,
And the green woodpecker and screeching jay,
Outspread their wings and flew scared away ;
And on a sudden, with leap and bound,
My neighbour's collie, marked black and
tan,
Sprang panting into the garden seat,
His collar aglow with my neighbour's name !
So my neighbour himself cannot be far,
Ah, I care not now how wrong things are !
I know I am ignorant, foolish, and small
As this wandering emmet that climbs my dress,
Yet I know that now I had answered ' Yes '
(Were I asked my will by the Father of all) ;
' I desire to be, I am glad to be born ! '
And all because, on a soft May morn,
My neighbour's collie-dog, black and tan,
Leapt over the privet-hedge, and ran
With a rush, and a cry, and a bound to my side,
And because I saw his master ride

(Laying spurs to his willing horse)

Over the flaming yellow gorse.

Awake, my heart ! I may not wait !

Let me arise and open the gate,

To breathe the wild warm air of the heath,

And to let in Love, and to let out Hate,

And anger at living, and scorn of Fate,

To let in Life, and to let out Death,

(For mine ears are deaf to the passing-bell—

I think he is buried now, out of the way ;)

And I say to myself, 'It is good, it is well ;

Squirrels that sport and doves that coo,

And leaves that twinkle against the blue,

And green woodpecker and screeching jay,—

Good-morrow, all ! I am one of you !'

Since now I need neither muse nor read,

I may listen, and loiter, and live instead ;

And take my pleasure in love and play,

And share my pastime with all things gay,

By the side of the ruined terrace,

In the breath of the early spring.

'GOING SOUTH.'

I CAME from lands of mist and rain,
And hurried, for one sleepless night,
Through landscapes clothed in wintry white,
And where the bare Burgundian vines,
Like antlers of a buried herd,
Pierced through their chilly counterpane.

Against the windows sleet and snow
Beat, as determined to the last
To bear me company : I passed
Bleak sandy tracks, where dwarfish pines
And stunted olives, tempest-stirred,
Swayed desolately to and fro.

'Going South.'

'I journey on to warmth and light,
I whispered to my falt'ring heart,
So lonely at the saddest part
Of this, my voyage to the sun,
Wrapped in the curtains of the night,

And fearing what the dawn might hold,
Whilst still unto my aching brain
The measured clatter of the train
Echoed, in mocking monotone,
'To warmth and light,' when all was cold.

But by-and-by, by slow degrees,
Chill Nature thawed to greet the dawn ;
The clinging frost and snow were gone,
The sky beamed blue behind the hills,
The birds were singing on the trees.

The sun rose gaily, all the earth
Seemed warm again with love and Spring,
The olive-leaves swayed glistening
With silv'ry lustre, and the rills
Leapt frost-freed to a brighter birth.

'Going South.'

9

A thousand scented southern balms
The zephyr wafted to my brow,
The orange hung upon the bough,
The almond flowered fair beneath
The tufted majesty of palms.

The wavelets of a tideless sea
Crept softly to the rosy shore,—
The overhanging mountains bore
Myrtle and mignonette and heath,
And fragrant tangled bryony.

The aloe raised its pointed spears,
The red geranium blossomed wild,
Anemones and violets smiled,
The faint mimosa drooped ; above
The rocks were fringed with prickly pears.

'Twas then I felt my soul revive ;
The winter chilled my heart no more ;
I looked upon that sunny shore
And said, ' I come to life and love,—
I come to thee to love and live.'

TOO LATE!

IN the summer time, ere the grass was mown,
Where the tall ox-daisies grew to her knee,
There wandered a maiden all alone,
In silken kirtle and golden zone,
By the river that flows to the sea.

And often she looked down its silvery way,
As she watched the wandering swallows skim
The leaves of the lilies, that quivering lay,
Seeming only a span from the glittering bay,
And her day-dreams were always of him:

Thus wandered she wearily to and fro
Amongst the wavering meadow flowers,
And she watched the seasons come and go
Till the white with daisies was white with snow,
And the birds fell asleep in the bowers.

But her true love lingered, and lingered still,
Till again the earth was awake with spring ;
And her heart grew sad, as a maiden's will
Who has waited and watched over dale and hill
For a love that is lingering.

But, at last, as, shading her eyes with her hand,
She looked down the river's silvery way,
She 'spied a pinnacle that made for the land,
And that glided anon to the flowery strand
That seemed but a span from the bay.

He has stept to the shore and found her fair,
Yet he was not the hope of her life's young dream ;
Still he seemed like the answer vouchsafed to a prayer,
Ere her own true lover had time to be there,
And he bore her away on the stream.

But her true love will come ere the hawthorn sheds
Its tremulous blossoms of virginal May,
And he'll find but a sprinkling of daisy-heads,
With a broken girdle in golden shreds,
By the river that flows to the bay.

A FOREBODING.

I DO not dread an altered heart,
Or that long line of land or sea
Should separate my love from me,
I dread that drifting slow apart—
All unresisted, unrestrained—
Which comes to some when they have gained
The dear endeavour of their soul.

As two light skiffs that sailed together,
Through days and nights of tranquil weather,
Adown some inland stream, might be
Drifted asunder, each from each ;
When, floating with the tide, they reach
The hoped-for end, the promised goal,
The sudden glory of the sea.

TO A COUNTRY DAFFODIL.

WITH hanging head and fluted stalk,
 A golden herald of the Spring,
 Telling how thrushes build and sing
 Amongst the laurels, in the walk
 Where *we* have also loved and sung,

Come, daffodil, and whisper true,
 (Here amongst city fog and smoke,) `What tidings of our trysting oak,
 Where squirrels sport and pigeons coo,
 As though the world were ever young?

Tell me how all your brethren fare,
 Upstanding in the garden-beds ;
 And if the snowdrops' modest heads
 Look earthwards yet, or high in air,
 And if the crocuses are there ?

To a Country Daffodil.

And if the forest-glades are gay
With hyacinths, or silver-strewn
With wood-anemones, too soon
That bow their heads and pass away,
Dying the death of all things fair?

Tell me all this, and something more,
What I would wish you most to tell,—
Say, 'He is true, and he is well,
And still he loves you as before ;'
Then nestle near me, where you will.

Or, if it please you to be seen
And hold your head above them all,
I'll wear you at a royal ball,
Where you may meet a future Queen—
High honour for a daffodil !

AN APRIL CLOUD.

LOOKING this morning in my glass,
 I see that I am heavy-eyed,
 With lines and shadows traced and dyed
 Beneath my lashes, and I say,
 ‘Why do I feel this weary ache?
 How came this sorry change to pass?
 Maybe my dreams were bad.’ . . . Alas
 I know it now ! To meet its woe
 My poor heart leaps, but half awake.
 Ah, bitter waking-up !—I know
 We tried to quarrel yesterday ;
 We bandied words, and strove to break
 The links that Time took years to make !
 Ah ! . . . kiss the memory away !

A MAY SONG.

A LITTLE while my love and I,
Before the mowing of the hay,
'Twined daisy-chains and cowslip-balls,
And carrolled glees and madrigals,
Before the hay, beneath the may,
My love (who loved me then) and I.

For long years now my love and I
Tread severed paths to varied ends;
We sometimes meet, and sometimes say
The trivial things of every day,
And meet as comrades, meet as friends,
My love (who loved me once) and I.

But never more my love and I
Will wander forth, as once, together,
Or sing the songs we used to sing

A May Song.

17

In spring-time, in the cloudless weather ;
Some chord is mute that used to ring,
Some word forgot we used to say
Amongst the may, before the hay,
My love (who loves me not) and I.

A REGRET.

‘**Y**OURS be the blame,’ she said, and sighed ;
 ‘Yours be the blame for all I feel’—

She turned away upon her heel,
 And saw him leave her wonder-eyed ;
 Then suddenly, with no ‘Good-bye,’
 Before the morrow came he died.

Of what avail then sighs or tears
 For spoken words that left a sting?
 Will he remember anything
 Of that which haunts her thro’ the years,
 Or hear the echo of her sigh,
 Or share the burden that she bears?

‘*Mine* was the blame!’ she weeps and cries,
 ‘Oh, love ! my love ! mine was the blame !’
 He does not answer to his name,
 Or soothe her now with soft replies,
 His form is hid from human eye,
 His mind is closed to memories.

AT HER FEET.

SUGGESTED BY A PICTURE OF A GIRL KNITTING, WITH A POET
AT HER FEET.

AS I lay at your feet the other day,
 I opened a book with a gilded rim,—
 A silken 'Keepsake,' wherein pourtrayed
 Simpering matron and star-eyed maid,
 With flowing ringlets and bosoms of snow,
 Peeped up from under the binding frayed,
 With sweet shy glances, their forms arrayed
 In the fanciful garments of long ago,—
 And I toyed with its pages, and tried to skim
 Some lordling's notion of poet's lay ;
 And I thought, 'Fair ladies where are ye now,
 Married, and buried, and hidden away,
 Or grown, maybe, into grandams grim,—
 Where is the poet who rises and wakes
 His shuddering lyre for your faded sakes

Whose hairs are gray, and whose eyes are dim ?
So presently perish all things fair ! ' . . .
Then, looking up, I saw you there,
Under the shade of the chestnut bough,
Your sun-hat tilted over your brow,
Almost hiding your rippling hair ;
And with fair young figure, lithe and slim,
Leaning back in your garden chair,
Whilst your slender fingers, busily bare,
Were knitting away at the second row
Of something for somebody else to wear.
And your spirit so far, *so far* from me,
Who lay all the while so near your feet
(Only an inch from your little shoe,
Under the shade of the self-same tree) !
Then I thought, ' Was there ever a maid
so sweet ? '
And sweet will she be when her hair is gray,
And the years shall have deadened her dear eyes'
blue ! '
But your mind was a thousand miles away,
As, leaning back in your garden chair,
You counted your stitches and thought of him,
Whilst I could have sung out my soul for you !

THE KINGFISHER.

A BALLAD.

I.

BESIDE the leafy river-bed,
 Waving with wealth of willow-weeds,
 Poised in the pollard overhead,
 We watched him from amongst the reeds.

Bright as a jewel to behold,
 His bosom flashing tropic hues,—
 Purple and amaranth and gold,
 With emerald greens and peacock blues.

You held the brambles o'er my head,
 And bade me neither speak nor stir ;
 'Stay still a little while,' you said,
 'Or we shall scare the kingfisher.'

The Kingfisher.

The cruel kingfisher stayed on,
Peering o'er weed and watercress,
Until the lilies one by one,
Folded their leaves for weariness.

You held aside the briers and bine ;
We did not speak, we did not stir ;
But by-and-by your lips sought mine—
We kissed, and scared the kingfisher.

II.

Now once again I seek the stream
Waving with purple willow-weed ;
A flutt'ring sound, a flashing gleam—
The kingfisher has flown to feed.

There still the water-lilies grow,
Here trail the sprays of brier and bine,
As on that day, so long ago,
When first your faithless lips met mine.

The cruel kingfisher stays on,
Peering o'er weed and watercress ;
And now the lilies, one by one,
Fold up their leaves for weariness.

The Kingfisher.

23

Recalling all I would forget,

I do not speak, I do not stir ;

My heart is full, my eyes are wet—

I weep, and scare the kingfisher.

A WEDDING.

HE stands before the altar-rails
 To plight his troth to her—a child,
 Who had not heard the o'er true tales
 Of his rash youth and manhood wild.
 And overhead are smiling skies,
 As though to augur all is well ;
 And village swains
 Sing merry strains,
 And gaily rings the village bell.

She little knows, that lily bride,
 What those glad joy-bells said to one,
 Who, sitting by her lone fireside,
 Nursed tearfully her little son.
 Yet overhead are smiling skies,
 As though to augur all is well ;
 To drown the sighs
 That may arise,
 Sing, village swains ! Ring, village bell !

REST.

IN green old gardens, hidden away
 From sight of revel and sound of strife,
 Where the bird may sing out his soul ere he dies,
 Nor fears for the night, so he lives his day ;
 Where the high red walls, which are growing gray
 With their lichen and moss embroideries,
 Seem sadly and sternly to shut out Life,
 Because it is often as sad as they ;

Where even the bee has time to glide
 (Gathering gaily his honeyed store)
 Right to the heart of the old-world flowers,—
 China-asters and purple stocks,
 Dahlias and tall red hollyhocks,
 Laburnums raining their golden showers,
 Columbines prim of the folded core,
 And lupins, and larkspurs, and ‘London pride ;’—

Where the heron is waiting amongst the reeds,
Grown tame in the silence that reigns around,
Broken only, now and then,
By shy woodpecker or noisy jay,
By the far-off watch-dog's muffled bay ;
But where never the purposeless laughter of men,
Or the seething city's murmurous sound
Will float up under the river-weeds.

Here may I live what life I please,
Married and buried out of sight,—
Married to Pleasure, and buried to Pain,—
Hidden away amongst scenes like these,
Under the fans of the chestnut trees ;
Living my child-life over again,
With the further hope of a fuller delight,
Blithe as the birds and wise as the bees.

In green old gardens, hidden away
From sight of revel and sound of strife,—
Here have I leisure to breathe and move,
And to do my work in a nobler way ;
To sing my songs, and to say my say ;
To dream my dreams, and to love my love ;
To hold my faith, and to live my life,
Making the most of its shadowy day.

'IF ONLY WE HAD TIME TO SPARE.'

IF only we had time to spare
 To taste the glories of the Spring,
 How good to leave this noise and glare,
 And breathe the blessed country air,
 And hear the songs the wild birds sing,
 If only we had time to spare !

Then you should stretch you at my feet
 And read aloud, and I should sew,
 And now and then our eyes might meet
 And we might murmur phrases sweet
 And blissful hours would come and go
 If only we had time to spare !

But as you toil, and as I pray
 For happier and idler hours

28 *'If only we had time to spare.'*

Noon follows dawn, night follows day,

I look, and lo, your locks are gray

And Winter withers up our flowers

Ere ever we have time to spare !

UNDER A LATTICE.

FROM THE SPANISH.

‘CLUNG round with clematis the lattice stands
 Still open, opened by those vanished hands;
 Within, a darker day, a lesser light,
 Recalls the vision that has taken flight—
 A vision of soft eyes and hanging hair,
 And all that, until yesterday, was there,
 And nestled near my heart, and seemed mine own,
 And loved me yesterday, and now—is flown !

‘O empty open window, from above
 Send down some dear memento of my love !
 Some perfume, sweeter than the clematis,
 Some truant echo of a lingering kiss !
 Or were it even but one little hair
 (Trapped in a tendril as she watched me there),
 How would I treasure in my lonely breast
 Such falling feather from our empty nest !’

So sighed I, lonely, when an aged man,
Who, passing, saw my sorrow, thus began
With words of wisdom to reprove my gloom :
' My son,' said he, ' once in yon very room
I, too, in days which live in fancy yet,
Tasted the happiness you now regret ;
And when my happiness had passed away,
I, too, stood sighing where you stand to-day.

' But not all neatly shod and gaily dressed,
My love departed from our nuptial nest
On tasselled mule, or in a soft sedan,
Wafting an arch " Good-morrow !" from her fan,
And almost surely to return again.——
Wan as a lily-bell, my love was lain
In that poor narrow bed we all must know,
Beside a lesser lily, white as snow
(Ah, sorry bridal bed for one so fair !).
And though my heart broke not with my despair,
Yet was it very weary with my pain ;
And weary are these eyes that watch in vain,
And may not see what once they held so dear ;
Wherefore, on this one day in ev'ry year,

I seek this hostelrie and here repine :
Know now, my son, my woes outmeasure thine.'

He ended, and in grateful mood I said,
'Thank God, though gone from me, she is not dead !'

WAITING.

PLEASANT it is to watch and wait
 By lone sea-shore or forest dell,
 For some one that we love so well ;
 We half are glad he comes so late
 (When we can count his coming sure).

Since then we taste our promised good
 Ere ever he can wend his way
 By the blue curve of shining bay,
 Or thro' the tangle of the wood,
 (For we can count his coming sure).

And earth, and sky, and forest tree,
 Or far expanse of silv'ry sand,
 Seem touch'd as with a magic wand,
 And glorious with a joy to be
 (Since we can count his coming sure).

Tis even thus I wait him here,
And scan afar the forest glades,
And wander through the green arcades,
And strive to know his presence near
(If I can count his coming sure).

But as I watch, and as I wait,
The ev'ning shadows grow apace,
The last rook seeks its roosting-place,
The latest swain goes through the gate,
Ah, can I count his coming sure ?

THE SILENT PLAYER.

AT 'HAMLET,' DECEMBER 30, 1878.

I MEANT to write of Hamlet ; how he mouthed
 Or did not mouth enough, or how he seemed
 More mad than should a prince in ecstasy,
 Or strangely sane : of what was Shakespeare's mind
 Concerning Hamlet : Whether 'twas his will
 To make him mad, or merely seeming so,
 Because he dared not set such lib'ral speech
 Into a sane man's mouth in times like his.
 And next I meant to cavil at the dress,
 The feathered bonnet, and the silken hose ;
 Then laud the earnest effort made, and ask
 If this were genius, and then reply
 I know not wholly what. . . .

Then had I praised,
 And more than praised, nor nearly praised enough,
 The fair Ophelia, form and voice and face

Seeming a sweet incarnate revelation
Of the great Master's mind. Or, like a saint
Frightened from off some high cathedral-pane
By sun or moonbeam, essence of a dream,
Too fair for flesh and blood, yet shedding tears,
Real briny tears, for love of mortal man.

Thus had I meant to write ; but, looking round
From where I sat in cosy cushioned chair,
I saw, above, below, in box and stall,
A serried line of critics, with their gaze
Intent and fixed, all 'eager for the fray ;'
Dealers of thunderbolts, which, ready poised,
Would fall to-morrow. Then I felt abashed,
And half-ashamed, and murmured to myself,
'Wilt thou, poor poet, lift thy pigmy pen
And pass thy raw opinion on the players,
When even these may fail to read them right,
And blunder with their bombshells ?'

So I turned
From black-browed Hamlet with his waving plume,
From golden-haired Ophelia and her flowers,
From guilty King and 'seeming-virtuous' Queen,
From old Polonius, staunch Horatio,

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, well-favoured Osric,
Gravediggers, courtiers, players ; I left the lot,
Lacking the nerve to tackle e'en the Ghost,
And went, forthwith, and took the lowest place
As critic of the least amongst them all—
A silent actor—only a sad skull,
Upheaved not even from a natural grave.
'Alas, poor Yorick !' He that played the part
Of that poor pate of thine played passing well,
And spoke, in silence, plainer than the rest !
My heart went out to him, and wondered whether
His freed soul watched the actors, Hamlet-wise,
And if in anger, or with interest,
Gnawing the feathers from a phantom-fan,
Or clapping kindly with his spirit-hands ?
And what had been that other part he played,
Played out (how long ago ?) as king or clown,
Soldier or scholar, honest man or knave ?
Whether from desecrated marble urn,
Or from the quicklime of a felon's grave,
These bones were gathered that played here to-night ?

There must be cruel choice of dead men's bones
Whilst rulers make new wars, and martyred saints ;

Whilst men, misnamed of peace, arise, and fan
The smould'ring fires betwixt opposing creeds,
Thinking to do God service.

So, poor skull,

It may be that thou hast rolled hitherward
(Bereft of aureole or warrior's helm)
From the sad cell of some sweet Magdalen,
Or from the furrows of a tented field
Whereon thou wert a victor ! Who can say ?
But, be thou that which little Peterkin
Found, 'smooth and round,' 'beside the rivulet,'
A waif from Blenheim, or some virgin's skull
Filched from the far-famed thousands at Cologne,
Thou'st played thy part right well, and told to-night
An old, old story !

Moralising thus,

I don my cloak, and clasp a careless arm,
Then drive to supper. . . .

*'WHAT I WOULD THAT HE SHOULD
SAY.'*

IF I am cruel though you are kind,
 If I taunt and tease you with passionate words,
 If I feel no faith in the vows that bind,
 And deem your love as the birds',—

Bear with me, and say, 'Men are oft forsworn ;
 She may read by the light of some phantom-flame,
 Showing mournful mothers and maids forlorn,
 And "lover" the lightest name.

'And for this, for this, doth she seem to err,
 And dream for ever that men betray,
 Since how should she know that my love for her
 Was never the love of a day?'

DIVIDED.

THEY did not quarrel ; but betwixt them came
Combining circumstances, urging on
Towards the final ending of their loves.
Could they have smote and stung with bitter words,
Then sued for pardon on a blotted page,
And met, and kissed, and dried their mutual tears,
This had not been. But every day the breach
Widened without their knowledge. Time went by,
And led their footsteps into devious paths,
Each one approving, nay, with waving hand
Praying God-speed the other, since both roads
Seemed fair, and led away from sordid things,
And each one urged the other on to fame.
He was a very Cæsar for ambition ;
And she, a simple singer in the woods,
Athirst for Nature—ever needing her
To crown a holiday, and sanctify

As with a mother's blessing, idle hours.
A bramble-blossom trailing in the way
Seemed more to her than all his talk of Courts
And Kings and Constitutions ; but his aims
Rose far above the soaring of the lark,
That leaves the peeping daisy out of sight.
The State required him, and he could not stay
Loit'ring and ling'ring in the ' primrose path
Of dalliance ; ' and so it came to pass,
These two, that once were one, are two again,
And she is lone in spirit, having known
A sweeter thing than pipe of nightingale
Or scent of hawthorn, and yet loving these
And clinging to them still, though desolate,
And, like the lady of the ' Lord of Burleigh,'
Lacking the ' Landscape-painter ' in her life.
Thus, all her songs are sad—of withered leaves,
And blighted hopes, and echoes of the past,
And early death ; and yet she cannot die,
But lives and sings, as he, too, lives and climbs,
Far from the sight of waving meadow-grass ;
And so they walk divided.

Were it well

So soon to sever such a tender tie,

With never a reproach and none to blame,
And not one tear? With friendly greetings now
At careless meetings, cold and unforeseen,
As though no better days had ever dawned ;
And all—for what ? . . .

Nay, be it for the best !
Who knows, if we love well till we regret
And sigh, in sadness, for a good thing gone ?
Thus, all may work to wisdom.

Wherefore, wake
With wind-strewn cuckoo-bloom and daffodil,
Fond foolish love of spring-tide and hot youth,
And die when these have perished ! . . .

ANOTHER SPRING.

THEY are here again, with their mocking notes,
Cuckoo, and linnet, and nightingale—
‘Welcome to Spring!’ from a thousand throats
That trill and quaver through wood and vale.
Yet there, on his bed, lies the dead man, pale,
And these blossoming limes, in their holiday coats,
Wave over a kingdom of husk and shell,
Of broken branch and of mouldering leaf.
But the young leaves live ; so I say, ‘It is well,—
It is well with an old and a new belief ;
There is Death beneath us, and Life above,
And betwixt the two, for a transient spell,
Ere the March-strewn seed shall be bound in the sheaf,
There is lent us a little time to love.’

A RAINY SUMMER.

THIS year we had no time for commune sweet,
 With spires of snowy chestnut overhead ;
I lying, with the bluebells, at your feet,
 As from an old-world book, mayhap, I read
 Some tale of knightly prowess for fair dame ;
For scarcely had I smoothed the pages,—so,—
 And looked for inspiration in your eyes,
And sighed, and sought your little hand, when, lo,
Wildly the winds of heaven began to blow,
 And all alarmed and fluttering you fled,
With waving of white garments to and fro,
 Whilst from the jealous unrelenting skies
 Th' inevitable July downpour came,
Nor left me time to say what I had said.

THE PEAR-TREE.

A LITTLE garden once I knew
But just outside the city's brawl,
Wherein a twisted pear-tree grew
Above a grey old-fashioned wall.

And in those days I used to wait
And hunger for a coming tread,
And fifty times would seek the gate
Before the length'ning shadows spread.

And then, against the evening sky,
That tufted pear-tree, in the gloom,
I likened to a Cherokee,
With tomahawk and waving plume.

And when his brow seemed bland and kind,
I said, 'I have not long to wait ;'
Then once more drew aside the blind,
Or sought again the garden-gate.

But if his brow was blurred with storm,
And wildly waved his floating feather,
And all the outline of his form
Was racked and rent with angry weather,—

I took it for a luckless sign,
Fearing some evil might arise,
And watched the gath'ring planets shine
With aching heart and anxious eyes.

'He will be late,' I used to say,—
'Nay, will he even come at all?'
Seeing the Indian's figure sway
Above the old gray garden-wall.

Ah, foolish fancies, past and dead !
Ah, little garden, green and gay !
Who listens now for coming tread,
Or threads your narrow paths to-day ?

Once have I passed your lichen'd wall
Whereon the tangled creepers climb,
And peeped within the gate, but all
Seemed altered by the touch of Time

And, looking up to where, of yore,
There waved the well-known wishing-tree,
My heart grew doubly sad—it bore
No likeness to a Cherokee !

'DOLCE FAR NIENTE.'

... **S**O now my love, what matter when we die
 And leave this world of sorrow-faring men?
 Wielders of sword, and drivers of the pen,
 Who fret and fume and strive, I know not why,
 Since all my life is turned to holiday.

Here will I rest me, lying in the shade,
 And smile to see men toiling in the sun,
 The end achieved, the promised guerdon won,
 Deep drinking of the draught for which I prayed
 Whilst all the world seems turned to holiday.

Death would be pleasant so, should no sharp pain
 Curdle the blood or agonise the mind,
 So, hearts united, and so, arms entwined,
 We two could fade out from this mortal train
 Who find scant space for making holiday.

You say 'tis no man's mission to lie so,
Watching the sunlight sifting through green boughs ;
You tell of men who breathed heroic vows,
Smote, or were smitten, and were glad to go,
And knew no time for love or holiday.

'Up and away !' you say, 'from scenes like these,
Where languid nights succeed the listless days,
Seek out some poor man's good, some good man's
praise ;
Nor lie, like Samson, at Delilah's knees,
Making all life to seem like holiday.'

Ah ! this from thee, Delilah, this from thee !
Who taught the shepherd to forsake his flocks ?
Who stole his heart, and sheared away his locks ?
No good man now shall speak good word of me,
So let all life seem love and holiday !

BALLAD.

‘A SHADOW stands outside my door,
Through all the noontide din ;
But when the revels of day are o’er
I rise and let it in.

‘The voices are hushed, and the lights are dead
When I open the doorway wide,
And the curtains are drawn around the bed
Where you sleep by my side.

‘Then I talk to my guest in accents low,
And I live the old life anew
With the ghost of a man, dead long ago,
Whom I loved far better than you.’

IN AN IRISH CHURCHYARD.

A MONGST these graves where good men lie,
 Mute, ozier-bound, in dreamless sleep,
 Above whose heads the browsing sheep
 And careless painted butterfly
 Pasture and sport in summer grass,

 Brown as the blasted Dead-Sea fruit,
 As banned to barrenness and dearth,
 Behold yon patch of rusty earth,
 Whereon no turf has taken root,
 No summer shadows flit and pass,

 Whilst here, a garden neat and trim,
 All fuchsia-fringed and pansy-starred,
 With gilded gateways locked and barred,
 And double-daisies for a rim
 Surrounds a tomb, with foot and head

In an Irish Churchyard.

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Guarded by angel-forms that weep,
In marble from Carrara's mines,
Whilst Fame a laurel chaplet twines,
And golden letters, graven deep,
Blazon the honours of the dead.

He died as clarions smote the air
To tell of vict'ry and renown ;
They brought him to his native town,
Near which the lands and lordships were
That owed him fealty in the west

She died in those despairing days,
Bowed down by all the griefs she had,
And only that they deemed her mad,
They buried her by no cross-ways,
And drove no stake into her breast.

She sleeps beneath yon rusty peat,
Withered as by avenging fires ;
Amongst the noblest of his sires
He lies with angels at his feet,
And golden gates to keep secure.

In an Irish Churchyard.

And 'twixt the two, all ozier-bound,
Half melted into mother earth,
Scarce two feet long, by one in girth,
A little nameless baby-mound
Pleads for the sins of rich and poor.

THE POET.

THE poet was not born to teach
 A moral lesson to mankind ;
 He hath no solemn creed to preach,
 But, fancy-free and unconfined,
 By sunlit glade or gray sea-beach
 His lyre wakes to the shifting wind.

And if he be a minstrel true,
 Its ev'ry sound should charm your ears,
 Of ev'ry cloud the changing hue
 Should bear some fruit in smiles or tears,
 And all his songs should waft to you
 An echo of some voice he hears.

Thus, true to Nature and to Art,
 He flings his music on the gale ;
 And even should its tones impart
 But gall and bitterness, and fail

To ease his own o'erburdened heart
And prove to yours of no avail,

From love of song alone he sings,
And as his mood is foul or fair
His voice in tune or discord rings ;

No matter ! so the voice be there.
And should his lyre e'en snap its strings
He will not know, he will not care !

A MEMORY.

A THOUSAND lilies blossom, unaware,
 Here, where the earth seems chill with buried love,
 And in the flow'ry arbutus the dove
 Still calls her truant mate, who lingers yet,
 As though the world were always sweet and fair,
 And you and I had nothing to regret
 And hope for against hope, and think upon
 Till all things fade !

And so your lips may often wear a smile,
 And so my heart may leap to music still ;
 Your soul may fire, and all your being thrill,
 And all your manhood lift itself on high
 In din of battle, or in sacred aisle ;
 Yet under all must lurk one memory,
 The grieving for a good time that is gone,
 Till all things fade !

AT TWILIGHT.

THE day is ended—this autumn day,
 So like to the days that have ended before ;
 The knock of a friend, maybe, at the door,
 Who gives his greeting, and says his say,
 And then goes his way.

The posts are all in, and the news all read—
 There is fighting abroad, and carping here—
 We have heaved a sigh, and smothered a tear,
 As we pored o'er the printed names of the dead
 Ere the daylight fled.

The flocks are in fold, and the steeds in stall,
 And the moon is as red as a rising sun ;
 Whilst in twos and threes, or one by one,
 The ploughmen (thinking of nothing at all)
 Pass under the wall.

I would I could think of as little as they,
As they whistle along in their holland smocks !
Bound for the home where the cradle rocks,
And the good-wife spreads them their supper-tray
At close of the day.

But on *us*, who wonder and question and think,
Crowd weightier fancies, as daylight sets,
Hungers and thirstings and vain regrets,
That may not be sated with meat and with drink,
Or with poet's ink.

Fancies that never may stalk in the light—
Hovering phantoms of wasted hours,
Lingering odours of withering flowers,
Wavings of wings that have taken their flight—
These come with the night.

Yet whilst I can look in a true friend's face,
And thrill to the touch of a loving hand,
I suffer no fear ; but can take my stand,
And hold myself ready to lie in my place
At the end of the race.

To the length of our days this day adds one
 (One link the more as the chain grows long);
 Let us warm it with kisses and wreath it with song,
And mingle together our sands, as they run,
 With the days that are done.

'KILLED AT ISANDULA.'

HE wooed and won her in a week,
 The roar of London at its height,
 He seemed a very carpet-knight,
 So blue of eye and smooth of cheek—
 A stripling, scarcely learned in drill ;
 Nor loved they less in that they kissed
 Their first shy kiss of wedded love
 Far off from daffodil and dove,
 From hoary oak and tinkling rill,
 Or storied lovers' wonted tryst.
 So bright a love, so gay, so light !
 A love for Time to calm or kill ?
 A love for Care to wear or warm ?
 Fair-weather love to face a storm !

 Ah, bright boy-husband and glad girl-wife !
 What do you know of the ills to be,
 Of the ups and downs and burdens of life ?

And even now, as around your knee
The sunny-haired nestlings, one, two, three,
Clutch and clamber, in innocent strife,
 Toying with sword-knot or clinging to gown
(Toying with knot of a sword so bright !
 Clinging to gown so golden-gay !),
Comes there flicker of portent or whisper of word,
 Or ever a guess at the evil day ?
 At the mourning dress and the head bowed down,
And the blood-stains rusting that glittering sword ?

 '*I* guessed it !' in the after years
That wife may sigh between her tears.
 '*I* guessed it—if to grow more dear,
Day by day, and year by year
More linked together than in the past,
Forewarned the good time could not last.'
For the love of a maiden turned to a wife,
And the love of a wife grown into a mother,
(So he she loves seems husband, brother,
Truest lover, and warmest friend),
Goes broadening on towards the end,
Full to the flood-gates, wide and free,

Like a sea-bound river that nears to the sea,
And only fails her with failing life.

.
A call to arms ! and the whole land rang
With martial ardour and ominous clang
And clank of battle, as from afar
(Recalled from straying, as flocks to fold)
Rifleman, 'liner,' and brave hussar,
Colours flying, and numbers told,
Made them ready to sail for the war ;
Whilst here, at home, in the alehouse-bar,
Free in his speech, in his bearing bold,
With smiles on his lips, and stripes on his coat,
The serpent-tongued sergeant, with ribbons afloat
(Sly as reynard a-scent for game),
Lured on the innocent yokels, who sold
Their lives for a shilling, and dreamt of Fame.

For it was whispered, half aloud,
That what at first had seemed a cloud
Even no bigger than the hand
(Such as the Prophet, in Holy Writ,
Obtained, through sacrifice and prayer,
In old Judæa, long ago),

Had grown and grown, in that far land—
Had grown, and grown, and grown—till, lo,
Like wid'ning circles in a pond,
Its outer circle reached beyond
The counted girth, and none there were,
Whose straining sight could compass it,
Or guess the end ; and, as of old,
Lone widowed wives, and lily-maids,
Whose knights had sought the far Crusades,
Sat, desolate, in castled keep,
Embroidering banners ground in gold,
With Paschal Lamb and Holy Cross—
So did our wives and maidens weep,
Wan with their lingering good-byes,
Herded, like fawns, with startled eyes,
Bewildered at so sudden loss.

' But *he*, my love, he need never have gone ! . . .
It was cruel in one so kind ! ' she thought.
' Had order been issued, or lot been drawn,
He had gone with the rest ; but to go alone,
To the risk of a terrible doom, self-sought,
Leaving us lonely, who love him best ! '
So mourned the maiden turned to a wife,

So mourned the wife grown into a mother.
But, with the first news of the strife,
The stripling, too, had grown all other—
From boy to man, with blood aflame,
Strong of purpose, and hindered of naught,
The warrior-lion in his breast,
With flashing eyes and bristling crest,
Aroused for England's name and fame.

So, through the weary wintry days,
No flower in field, no leaf on tree,
She waited, waited, with her gaze
Fixed on the ever-changing sea ;
Too stunned to weep, too sad to smile,
Lest on that changing sea, the while,
Her love should suffer storm or wreck ;
Whilst, careless of all coming ill,
The noisy children gambolled still,
And laughed and clung about her neck,
Saw her eyes sad, and wondered why :
And thus the dreary days went by.

Then, when she knew him safe on shore,
For her new dangers, new alarms.

' *Safe?* ' Ay, but only safe, maybe,
From the fathomless depths of the perilous sea.
' *Safe?* ' Nay, rather encompassed the more
With new-fraught danger of death and pain !
Then letters and news. ' What news of the war ? '
' A victory to British arms ! '
' News of fighting, and news of slain ! '
' Ah, God ! . . . I pray it may not be ! ' . . .
With Being frozen to the core,
She seized the dreaded page and read
His name nor midst the maimed nor dead.
But as she bowed her head, and low
Breathed forth to Heaven her falt'ring thanks,
The wan ship, big with its tale of woe,
Steamed sadly over the harbour-bar :
' News ! ' ' What news ? . . what news of the war ? '
' News of blund'ring and defeat !
Slaughtered forms, and flying feet !
Captured colours and broken ranks !
News of numbers hacked and slain !
Of a nightmare scene, when a desperate band
Stood face to face and hand to hand
With a foe as dense as the desert sand,
Or the waves of the pitiless main ! '

O God ! that ever this should be !
And is it thus we learn Thy law,
And know Thee wise and good, O Lord,
E'en through the smittings of Thy sword ?
Or, for contempt of Thy decree,
Is it that now we feel Thy wrath ?
Or do we seem too base and small
(Friend or foeman, black or white,
Doing battle for wrong or right)
For Thine High Majesty to ward ?
Even of no account at all,
But as the wavering emmet-horde
Trickling over a garden-path,
Each with his self-sought burden of straw ;—
Yea, to Thy dread all-seeing sight,
Our marshalled armies in their might
May seem as small a thing to Thee.

Nay, what in Thy vast universe
Poor joy or individual pain ?
A little sun, a little rain,
A little love, a little hate,
A little chaff, a little grain,
If our prayers' echo or our curse

Reach e'en Thine outer palace-gate !
So small, so great a thing is man ;—
 In his intensity so great,
So small, in that so small a span
Divides his sunshine from the night,
The Finite from the Infinite !
Were it not better to have been
A senseless thing, a mere machine,
Dead to all loss, and dull to gain,
 Than to be mortal, yet possess
 This god-like gift of wretchedness ?
Yet e'en this cry of our distress
 May lift a veil, and strike a chord ;
 If it were but Thy will, O Lord,
To make Thy dread commandment plain—
Whether, in truth, we breathe again,
Or fall to dust with this poor verse.

As one that is stunned by a sudden blow
She sits within sight of the quieting seas,
Under the boughs of the blossoming trees,
 Whilst all the wakening woodlands ring
With the jubilant voices of mated birds,
Seeming to murmur, plain as words,

'Buds on the bough, and warmth in the nest,
And nestlings under the mother's breast :
Good-bye to winter ! Good-bye to snow !'
As the loit'ring feet of reluctant Spring
Come echoing up through bower and grove !
But still she sits and thinks of her love—
Of her lover, slain by the dusky foe.
What profit to her that skies are blue ?
That frosts are finished, or seas subside ?
She sighs to be gone where her husband died,
And her widowed heart had been broken for woe,
But for those hours of the desolate night
When, sinking into a troubled rest,
She may dream the terrible tale untrue ;
And she longs for a word, for the mail is due—
He is deaf, he is dead, yet she hungers to write !

'Here I am sitting in the sun ;
My pen is in my eager hand,
To tell him all my thoughts and deeds,
All I have dreamt about and done.
He is but in another land ;
And as he thinks of me, and reads
"I love you still," his heart may beat ;

And all this scene his mem'ry knows,
Perhaps, will beam upon his sight.
"She sits upon the garden-seat,
Under the spreading chestnut-boughs ;
Around her, blaze of spring-tide light,
The glitter of a sunlit sea.
The purple hills across the bay
Fling down their shadows at her feet.
All this, to her, who dreams of me
(She writes me this, though far away),
Seems sweetly sad, and sadly sweet."
Yes, some such tender thought as this
May reach him with the words I write,
Since all my daylight dreams he knows ;
And I will send, inside, a kiss,
Kissed into these, the blossoms white
I gather from this early rose !

' Ah, I am mad ! For he is dead !
Lying alone, in a savage land,
God-forsaken and man-forgot !
A great strange sun stares overhead,
And shines on him, and knows him not.

Or chilly rains, from friendless skies,
Beat down upon his blinded eyes,
And cold winds blow on him by night,
Whilst foul birds hover close at hand—
Noisome vulture and desert-kite ;—
O God ! and is Thy will the best ?
He that has slept upon my breast—
My more than husband, my more than love,
No good thing seeming good enough
To win his favour, or gain his grace !
Could I have looked but once in his face,
And said to him all that I left unsaid,
And overwhelmed him with fond good-byes—
Then these dread days might have seemed less dread !

' O all lone maidens and widowed wives,
Come with me to the wilderness—
To the thorny plains of that great lone land,
Girt for vengeance, in martial dress,
Let us sally forth, like an Amazon band,
To hiss our hatred and hurl our ban
Right in the teeth of the fierce black man,
Who has murdered our lovers, and darkened our lives !
Oh, lead me away to that distant strand,

Let me linger there till my sight grows dim,
And the eyes of my spirit no longer strain
With the pitiful hope of a hopeless pain
To meet with some shadowy sign of him !'

‘ It was not right, but how could I know—
How could I know he would go so soon—
That his voice would be silenced? A year ago,
Late on that sorrowful afternoon,

'I said some words, and they gave him pain
(His voice is silent—it cannot chide),
And maybe I had uttered them over again—
Those bitter words—if he had not died !

‘ Oh, for every word that my rash lips said,
For every word that he grieved to hear,
My heart has been turned into ashes and lead,
And my soul will be sorry for many a year !

‘ But, heart of my heart ! you knew—you knew !
And yet you are deaf to my lone lament ;
Though the love has gone out of my life to you,
And my spirit has followed wherever yours went ! ’

I hold them blest, who, when a grief is near,
Can turn to Heaven, and say, 'Thy will be done !'
Then sit serene beneath a saddened sun,
And face a clouded future without fear—
I hold them blest, but nowise good or great.

Well knowing this is no fine force of Will,
But some persistent bias in the clay—
Some nerve or fibre gaining greater sway—
Some frail brain-fabric fashioned well or ill :
Thus do they kiss the rod, or rage at Fate.

So I, too, musing under budding trees,
Am sorry for her sorrow, and could weep,
But that I steel my spirit, and would keep
My heart as careless as the summer breeze,
And strong for service worthier than tears ;

Seeing that smiles and tears, for so short time
Dim sparkling eyes, or dimple rosy cheek,
Whilst Hydra-headed horrors howl and shriek
In face of these sweet heavens, abhorring crime,
And lend fresh lamentations to new years.

War, Plague, and Famine, free from all control,
Flaunt in the eye of day their forms accurst ;
And she, poor crouching victim of the first,
Seems but one floating atom on the whole
Vast sea of human misery and blood.

So grieve I for the ills that wrought her woe ;
These (were it mine to combat) would I smite
With stout two-edged sword, and, nerved for fight,
Fear not if arm should ache, or blood should flow,
Or ebbing life fail for so great a good !

And unto her may dawn some calmer day,
In future years, when she may cease to blame
The thick-lipped Kaffre with his assegai,
Forced by a tyrant's will to swell his fame—

When her full vision, taking freer scope,
May note the gleam of sunrise from afar,
The flush of wider wisdom, higher hope,
The hearts of nations warring against War !

A sunrise heralding that day of grace
When man may see the flag of Peace unfurled,
And when some new Evangel shall efface
A Cain-mark from the forehead of the world.

THE CENTENARIAN.

ONE hundred years ! . . . Yet all the world seems
young,

And, like my heart, still throbbing to the tune
Of soft recurring music ! . . .

Flower-wise,

Budding, and bearing blossom and ripe fruit,
The hopes and aspirations of old time
Would put forth branch and tendril, and unfold
Facing the sunlight, but a spectre-hand,
Bony, and shrunken, as is now mine own,
Blights ev'ry blossom, even in the bud,
Whilst croaking accents whisper in mine ear,
'Stay ! Thou art old ! . . . But three-score years and ten
Is man's appointed time upon the earth ;
What matter if the heart within thy breast
Keeps cognisance of spring or winter time,
Storm or fine weather, ebb or flow of tide,

Or changing moons? So, in a ruined hall
May wond'ring men hear some old timepiece tick
Through sudden jar of outward circumstance,
Then sink again to silence. *Young men* dream,
And plan and build, and sowing, hope to reap;
But *thou*, mere accident and freak of Fate,
Wait in thy dreamless twilight, nor presume
To seek preferment in the bannered lists
Where Youth strives on, and Beauty yields the prize!'
Ay, even so! . . .

And yet, not long ago
(Or so it seems to me), mine eyes were bright,
My cheeks aglow, and all the blood aflame
In these poor knotted veins! Then, with the rest,
By flower-strewn lawn or trellised window-pane
I too could sing of love, whilst rosy lips
Smiled down responsive! . . .

I remember, once,
Walking in summer, by the green sea-downs,
With one I loved unwittingly the while;
The sky was blue, and on the bluer wave
We saw the changing ships, like white-winged moths,
Flit down the far sea-line, or, merged in sky,
Race with the clouds. Sheer from the hanging cliff

Clung bramble-blossoms, myrtle, and wild heath,
Whilst far ahead, a forest of black firs
Bearded the ocean-bank, and seemed a goal
Whither we two were bound,—to what intent
My schoolboy heart wist not. Fine flower of speech
Comes not to lads o'er soon, and I remember,
Looking from right to left, from sea to shore,
From glow of heaven to bloom of maidenhood,
My soul seemed bound in silence, whilst the girl
Talked on of many things,—mere sounding words
Beside the secret gnawing at my heart,
The which she guessed,—being a woman born,
Although I dared not tell it to myself,
Fearing, maybe, to lose it. By-and-by,
Passing in front of me, she reached her hand
Seaward, to gather from the jutting cliff
Blossom or branch, when, sudden, crashing down
Fell shower of loosened stones and tufted grass,
Whilst on the utmost edge I saw my love
Clinging for very life to yielding briers,
And calling me, with horror in her eyes,
To save her if I loved her.

All this scene

Is clear as yesterday, and yet the years

Have blurred out later memories ! Ah, *then*
(When I had thought her dead, and laid her down
Upon the sward, beneath the straight-stemmed firs)
My words fell fast enough ! . . . She did not die,
But *now*, or she is dead, or old, *so old*,—
I dare not think of her ; her fair face fled
From out the world ! And whither ? (if she lives)—
Ah, whither ? . . . whither ? . . . Gone, to meet mine own
Of long ago, that bending down to hers
There, in the deep'ning twilight, found her lips.

And this was over eighty years ago ! . . .
A long man's life ! Ah, God, be good to me,
Nor let my living turn to a reproach
Till men shall mock at me !

. . . I know not wherefore

To-day, whilst looking from this balcony
At sky, and ocean, with its many sails,
This memory came to me, with the scent
Of brine and seaweed. Even thus, that day,
Like mimic ships, and dragons, and strong towers,
And floating seraphs, winged, with streaming hair,
Seemed all the hurrying clouds, and, as to-day,
So on that yesterday of long ago

If it had chanced

. . . Young men, and strong,

Were those three sons, begotten in my youth,
That halt and falter now for very age,
And seem so many sires ; save he that died—
Mine eldest-born, struck down in summer-prime,
He is a young man still ! With hound and horn
Scours he, through time, the happy hunting-grounds ?
Or 'midst the twanging of eternal harps
(His seeing too intense to light on us)
Loses he taint and consciousness of earth,

Whilst planets run their course, and suns subside,
And man, in his poor ant-hill, toils and strives,
And loves, and hates, and suffers ? . . .

Ah, how small,

How poor a thing, O Lord, with all made smooth,
Is this our life ! A little emmet's hour,
Wherein we have not even time to frame
The scaffolding for mere foundation of thought !
One hundred years ! . . . And am I better strung
To meet adversity ? . . . Yea, better far,
Wiser and stronger, as a corpse is wise
And strong to suffer, bearing scorn of fate,
Buffet of foe, and kissing of sweet lips,
Bearing all these alike ! . . .

One hundred years !

And all so green at core, so notched of bark,
The two men of me made so manifest
The soul would seem to wrestle with the flesh
And taunt it for a laggard ! 'Tis as though
I took my way through life in hood and mask,
My inner self concealed, yet ready primed
To leap to action ! In the damp church-vaults
Dare they to fasten down this eager spirit
That chafes his fainter brother, and would fly

With yonder sea-gull o'er the streak of gold
Flecking the far horizon ? Wherefore *here*
(In this my breast) lives fire at noble deed,
Desire for bold endeavour, and high truth,
Or hunger for dear love, whilst eyes are dim,
Whilst footsteps falter, and this wan white beard
Mocks me without the mirror, straying down
To meet the beating of my baffled heart ?

I say, to keep me brave, ' He cannot die,
This inner man, that rises up so strong
Within the crumbling stonework of his prison : '
But *Reason* hath a voice as well as Hope,
And in some seasons, crouching at my side,
She drones her dismal teachings ! . . .

It was strange
That on this ev'ning, looking at the ships,
My mind went back, ay, even eighty years,
To hug a ling'ring memory ! The ships
Sail on and on, across the window-square,
And pass and vanish ; it is even so
With us and our endeavour ! . . . Draw the blinds,
And close the window, for the ev'ning air
Gnaws at my heart, and chills the weaker man ;

Ay, but the soul is rampant, and will live
To set its foot upon this withered flesh
And shout out 'Victory !'

One hundred years !

If God hath not forgotten me, ere long
I too may read His riddle. . . . I must wait ! . . .

A LETTER.

' I AM sitting alone in the garden to-day, though the
 summer is well-nigh dead ;
 We have gathered the fruit, and garnered the hay, and
 the withering woods are red.
 All the beds on the terrace are yet aglow, and the roses
 are clustering still,
 But the tenderer blossoms are all laid low, and the even-
 ing breeze grows chill.
 A time-serving robin comes chirruping near ; he is 'ware
 of a terrible day,
 When the beds shall be bare and the woodlands sere, so
 he chirrups while chirrup he may.
 The children are shouting, with kite and with ball, away
 by the hazel-wood lane,
 And I—I have stolen away from them all, just to write
 to you once again.

‘But of what can I tell you, my only friend? That I
miss you by night and by day?

That the dreariest hours are these that I spend since the
one when you journeyed away?

That your form seems beside me when others are by, and
your head on my bosom at night?

That regrets will arise and ambitions die,—is it thus that
you would I should write?

Or else, of the questions up yonder, in town; of the
waverings to and fro,

Of the spirits of men, reeling up and down, as uncertain
of whither to go?

They are dallying now with a Christless creed, for the
olden-time fancies seem dead,

Like flowers that have withered and run to seed, and men
raise up these new ones instead.

But the tree is too fresh in the soil as yet, and they know
not what fruit it will bear;

And so still there are some with their minds firm-set
t’wards the desolate altars that were;

Whose feet seem to wander away from the light, into
shadowy pathways well trod,

Calling out for their Eve, or their Aphrodite, or Mary
the mother of God.

‘But around me these clamouring voices arose as the
sound of an unknown tongue,
Or the caws from yon cloud of harvesting crows, flying
home from the fields with their young ;
It may seem to you strange that I hope and wait, know-
ing well that I never may know ;
But I sit in my twilight, and bow to my fate, contented
that things should be so ;
Whilst I hear of man rising up after man, asking who it
was kicked off the ball ;
It was so, I am told, since the world began, ’twill be so to
the ending of all.

‘But, as heedless of all these changes of thought, of this
vast under-current of Doubt,
We smiled and we sorrowed, we sold and we bought, and
we jested at dance and at rout.
There was never an echoed step on the stair, or a form
at the turn of the street,
But my heart leapt up ready to greet you there, and to
throb at the sound of your feet.
Yet *here*, where the bracken waves under the pine, and
the heather glows pink on the hill,—
It is here, in this home that was yours and mine, that
your spirit seems lingering still ;

And, on days like this, when the summer is done, and
the children are gone to their play,

I can sit me down in the garden alone, and 'say all' that
I hunger to say.

For it seems to me now, at the turn of the year, ere the
tempests of Winter blow,

I must send a "good-morrow" to you, my dear, even
whether you hear it or no ;

For it lightens my heart of some part of its woe, and dries
some of the tears that I weep,

Ere I seek for the worthiest blossoms that blow, which
may die on the turf where you sleep.'

THE GHOST STORY.

ROUND-EYED and open-eared, the children sat
 To hear the story, by their mother's knee,
 Close to the glowing hearth. Without, the wind
 Made mournful music—sighing at the pane
 And rocking the great cedars. Now and then
 Fox-tail of fir, or swaying ivy-spray,
 Or leaf, storm-driven, seemed a goblin hand
 Feeling to find the bolt and enter in.
 A sense of mystery was in the air ;
 Familiar things looked other than their wont ;
 Even the calm face of the ticking clock
 Seemed human, and the flick'ring tongues of flame
 Fiend-like and ominous.

‘ On such a night—

On such a night as this’ (the mother spoke,
 Whilst all the children nestled near her gown)—
 ‘ On such a night as this—long, long ago,

When ladies' shoes were pointed, and their robes
Of cloth-of-gold, trimmed round with miniver,
Like kings' and queens' upon the playing-cards—
Just so the tempest howled—on such a night.'
'Oh!' cried the children (ev'ry yellow hair
Bristling expectant, as each cherub face
Paled with a growing ecstasy of horror).
'Remember,' said the mother, as she raised
Her slender fingers, all aglow with rings,—
'Remember, first, *the story is not true*,
Since well we know that fairies and poor ghosts,
Will-o'-the-wisps, magicians, and the like,—
All these, with vampires, witches, and wehr-wolves,
Are only meant to live in story-books,
And speed a winter's evening ; rest assured
This world we live in is no place for them ;
No one has seen them, save with fevered brain
Or tortured fancy ; but, suppose their sight
Healthful, and ev'ry fancied phantom real,
A poor sad ghost, at best a very shade,
Could do no harm to spirits joined to flesh,
Since these are far the stronger—two to one.
But, once for all, before my tale begins,
You know it is not true.'

‘We know, we know,

We know it is not true,’ the children cried ;

‘Yet tell it all the same !’

‘Long, long ago’

(The story thus began), ‘in ancient times,

An old gray Baron, with an only girl,

Dwelt in a castle, peaked and turreted,

In Picardy.’

And then the mother told

Of siege and sally and assault of arms,

Of drawbridge hoisted, and of loopholes lined

With cross-bow men, whose shafts so swiftly sped

They seemed a very rainfall, winged and barbed.

And then she told how, foremost in the fray,

As victor, too, at tilt and tournament

And deeds of daring, was a youthful knight,

Of noble presence, who had gained by stealth

The maiden’s love, with promise of her hand ;

Which should her sire withhold, the lady swore

To wed no other. So the days went by ;

And, hoping still, nor daring tell his hope

To the stern father, lest he dash it down,

The knight, to make preferment doubly sure

Through braver show of prowess, bade adieu

To France and lady-love, and bent his way
(After renewal of his plighted troth)
To Palestine, to fight the Saracen.
Then pined the lady in her castle-bower,
And all day long disconsolate she sat,
Her lute discarded and her silks unwound,
Dreaming beside the lattice. Suns and moons
Rose and declined, and re-arose anew,
And still he came not. Then the years went by,
The weary years, and still he did not come ;
And at her heart there grew a gnawing fear
That he had fallen in battle. Suns and moons
Rose and declined afresh, and re-arose ;
And then (the tidings of his certain death
Stunning her into marble) she was wed,
As one sleep-walking, to a worthy man,
Her father's friend, and all as old as he,
Yet brave and excellent.

And as one night
(On such a night as this), beside the hearth,
She sat, and watched the flick'ring of the flames,
That leapt and darted, whilst in high-backed chair
Half-slumbered the good knight, her graybeard spouse,
And then (as now) the winds of heaven, let loose,

Made roar and tumult, all her heart grew sad
Through thinking of her love of long ago,
The Picard knight, that some time over sea
Was slain in battle of the Saracen.
Her heart grew sad, and both her eyes grew dim ;
When, looking up, alert at sudden sound,
Uprose the lazy bloodhound at her feet,
And shook himself, and growled. With startled cry,
Hands clasped, and hair unbound, and eyes amazed,
She sprang towards the door ; since there, arrayed
In coat of mail, his visor all unhooked,
And his face pale as is the face of death,—
There stood the form of him she counted slain—
The Picard knight !

Then all the children cried
(The eldest calming with her soothing hand
A shudd'ring sister), ' Ah, it was a ghost !
It was a ghost ! The story is not true ! '
' Nay,' said the mother, ' it was not a ghost
(Though had it been, the less her cause for fear) ;
For (though he neither spoke, nor clasped her hand,
Looking but very sorrowful indeed,
And so departing) it was told next day,
How some retainers, loit'ring at the gate,

Had seen the young knight enter, with his train,
Nor had they questioned one they knew for friend ;
So let him pass, and after, pass away,
When (riding out) a varlet, leaning back,
Hissed out this parting wager to a page,
“ If my young master steers from Palestine
Cleft in the skull, and hindered in the reach,
A *second* time, *alive*, take thou my steed,
Trappings and all, and this my trusty brand,
And smite me for a liar ! ” Jestng thus,
The retinue passed out, across the bridge,
Their leader silent. He had seen and known,
And all his heart grew bitter ; and, once more,
Stricken alike in body and in soul,
He sought the Holy Land, to fight afresh,
And try forgetting.’

Then the mother told
How, overshadowed by a memory,
The lady lived a sad though peaceful life,
Praying much secretly, and how, at length
(As years went on), such curly heads as theirs
That listened now intently to the tale
Were grouped around her knees. And once again,
When all of these lay sleeping in their beds,

She sat at Christmas-time beside the hearth,
Watching the great yule log that flaked and fell,
Crumbling and flaring, as it lay at length
Betwixt the brazen dogs ; when, suddenly,
She heard a sound as of a troop of horse
Spurring across the drawbridge furiously,
As though pursued ; and scarcely this had died
When a chill blast fluttered the arras-folds
That hid the doorway, and within it stood
The young Crusader, pale as heretofore,
Yet with a milder look, which seemed to say,
'Thy fault is pardoned.'

'And was *this* a ghost ?'

Asked all the children.

'Yes,' the mother said,
'This was a ghost indeed (so runs the tale,—
As true a ghost as lives in story-books) ;
For, fighting out in Palestine, the knight
Was truly slain in battle ; and once dead,
He grasped all wisdom, and he knew her grief,
And so forgave her.'

Here the mother paused,
And, gazing at the embers of the fire,
As one that strains o'er utmost edge of sea,

Nor knows what lies between, she seemed alone
With some sad fancy, or as if, by chance,
All imperceptibly, the story took
Its colour from her own that told the tale,
Stirring a buried depth. For there are times
When, through some transient outward influence,
Sighing of autumn winds, or bar of song,
Or scent of garden-blossoms, thoughts arise
Which hold us spellbound.

‘Is the story done?’

The children asked at length ; and, thus aroused,
With quick-drawn sigh, she said, ‘The tale is done ;’
Then, one by one, impatient of her mood,
They slipped away, and left her there alone,
Musing beside the embers.

Leaning back,
A feather fan held lightly in her hand,
What voices seem to murmur in her ears
From out the dying embers in the hearth ?
What airy castles, peaked and turreted,
Rise at her bidding ? Hath her fancy fled
Back to the olden time ; and fall those tears
Through thinking of the youthful Picard knight
That died in Palestine, or for the dame

Who, loving well, yet broke her plighted troth
And wed another, proving loyal wife,
And looking only on her lover's face
In ghostly vision? Who may read aright
Tear-drop or passing smile, or guess her mind,
As, out of sight, she hears the children cry,
'Remember this was very long ago,
When ladies' shoes were pointed, and their robes,
Like kings' and queens' upon the playing-cards,
Trimmed round with miniver; besides, you know,
The story is not true.'

TIME.

I.

OF Time what may a poet sing,
 Who sees his seasons come and go,
 With heart that falters and eyes askance ?
 Who reads with sad prophetic glance
 The pitiful tale of the dead rose-garden
 All folded away in the buds of the spring,
 And dreams, awake, of the summer glow,
 Whilst snow-flakes fall, and whilst hoar-frosts harden,
 Yet hopes for nothing from change or chance,—
 How may a poet sing, and *know* ?

II.

Let him rise and tune to a mingled measure,
 Blood and roses alike bloom red—
 Pleasure in pain, and pain in pleasure—
 Bitter the hunger, and bitter the bread !

Time will tarnish a tawdry treasure,
Turn gold to silver, and silver to lead ;
Rise up and tune to a mingled measure :
Of Time, our master, what may be said ?

III.

Boy and girl, we have played together,
Hearts in slumber, and heads in air—
Maiden trim with the floating feather,
Sailor-lad, with a future clear,
Snatching a kiss as he climbed the stair—
(‘ Kiss me,’ he said, on the twilight stair,
Half for pastime, and half in sorrow)—
Sailor-lad, that would sail to-morrow
Out to the uttermost hemisphere.
A few hot tears, and a lock of hair,
And a widowed heart in the summer weather,
A widowed heart for the half of a year,
And the satisfied sense of a secret care,
Whilst squirrels were sporting and thrushes sung,
And the old folks whispered and gossiped together,
Each one snug in an easy-chair,
And murmured low, ‘ Beware, beware !
Not a word of this, lest the child should hear ;’
Heart of my heart ! it was good to be young !

IV.

Good ships have foundered the whole world over,
For the sea is a grave, and some hearts are sore
For stately ship and for sailor-lover
That never again come back to the shore.
But the maid is a bride, and the bride a mother
(Bud, and blossom, and blown-out flower),
And the new-born lives, one after another,
Are a-dance, like motes, in the sunlit hour ;
But the two arm-chairs stand there as witness,
Though the babes and the sucklings clamber and
crow :
'Tis the nature of all things in their fitness—
They were both of them old, it was time they should
go.'

V.

But *we*—we are young, we have time to linger
By pleasant pathways from Yule to June,
So never heed Time, with his warning finger
And shifting glass ; for it is but noon !
So pipe and sing to a blithesome tune,
Though it be as the song of the wandering singer,
Who loiters awhile, but who does not stay ;

Or the fatal vow of the faithless lover,
Who loves, and kisses, and rides away ;
Or the notes of the nightingale trilling in May,
Or the chirp of the grasshopper hid in the clover,
That wists not when they will mow the hay,
Nor knows when the nightingale's singing is over.

VI.

Yet were it well that these should know ?
A sorry world if all were wise—
If all life's finger-posts were plain,
And all the blind could find their eyes
To see that Wisdom's self is vain !
Nay, let the hour unchallenged go,
For wisdom cometh unaware,
When, coy at first, as violet hidden,
Or guest, unto the feast unbidden,
Death's messenger, the silver hair,
Glistens alike in brown and gold.
Alas, old friend, are the sands so low ?
Alas, my love, it is even so ! . . .
And can it be that *we* too are old ?

VII.

Yea, sit we down in the old folks' chair,
And watch we the little ones crow and clamber ;
We have woven yew-garlands for sunny hair,
And put out the lights in the bridal chamber ;
And hand in hand, and with dimming eyes
Wait we, and watch in the dusk together,
O love, my love of the summer weather,
Heart of my heart, who wert once so fair !
No more of toiling, no more of spinning,
No more heart-beatings, no more surprise ;
For the end is foreseen from the first beginning,
The castle is fall'n ere its turrets rise—
Ah, love, my love, it is sad to be wise !

VIII.

But Time, our master, stands winged and hoary,
And seeming to smile as he whets his blade ;
Whilst Love is whisp'ring the same old story,
And Hope seems shrinking and half afraid ;
For of these the measure of youth is made,
And the measure of pleasure, the measure of glory
Which is meted out to a human lot ;

And so on to the end (and the end draws nearer),
When our souls may be freer, our senses clearer
('Tis an old world creed which is nigh forgot),
When the eyes of the sleepers may waken in wonder,
And the hearts may be joined that were riven asunder,
And Time and Love shall be merged—in what ?

AFTERWARDS.

I KNOW that these poor rags of womanhood,—
 This oaten pipe, whereon the wild winds played,
 Making sad music,—tattered and outfrayed,
 Cast off, played out,—can hold no more of good,
 Of love, or song, or sense of sun and shade,

What homely neighbours elbow me (hard by
 'Neath the black yews) I know I shall not know,
 Nor take account of changing winds that blow,
 Shifting the golden arrow, set on high
 On the gray spire, nor mark who come and go.

Yet would I lie in some familiar place,
 Nor share my rest with uncongenial dead,—
 Somewhere, maybe, where friendly feet will tread,—
 As if from out some little chink of space,
 Mine eyes might see them tripping overhead

And though too sweet to deck a sepulchre
Seem twinkling daisy-buds, and meadow grass ;
And so, would more than serve me, lest they pass
Who fain would know what woman rested there,
What her demeanour, or her story was,—

For these I would that on a sculptured stone
(Fenced round with iron-work to keep secure),
Should sleep a form with folded palms demure,
In aspect like the dreamer that was gone,
With these words carved, '*I hoped, but was not sure.*'

